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9th Floor
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965-6494

MD rejects total allergy syndrome as invention

By BETTY LOU LEE
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TORONTO — There's no such thing as "total allergy syndrome," says Dr. Barry Kay of the Cardiothoracic Institute in London.

"We think total allergy syndrome was invented by the press," he said at a news conference at the Sixth International Congress of Immunology. "It's not a syndrome. It's a phrase you invented. There is no such thing in the medical literature."

While many more chemicals are in the general environment and the workplace to which some individuals may get allergic reactions, he rejects the idea of total allergy syndrome or "20th century disease."

Dr. Alain deWeck of the University of Bern, Switzerland, and president of the International Union of Immunological, was equally skeptical about total allergy syndrome.

"Indeed there are very large number of substances (to which people can have allergic reactions). But that has little to do with people believing they have an allergy to the air or water, and we have to make that distinction ... we must stay in the frame of what can be measureable and proven, not dreams."

More allergies

Allergic disease is on the increase in the industrialized world.

Hay fever alone increased by 30 per cent in a decade in some areas.

Dr. Kay said the role of food additives and colorings in hyperactivity in children is still questionable. He said some studies suggest a link, while others don't.

Dr. deWeck said it is possible to predict with tests in the first year of life who will have problems with allergies. Preventive measures like feeding vulnerable children mother's milk and avoiding contact with animals and other common triggers of reactions might be useful.

In the desert area of Kuwait, allergies to pollens were rare until projects to desalinate sea water got under way.

When it was possible to plant trees in irrigated areas, someone chose junipers — notorious for the allergic reactions their pollen can trigger.